

## THE FAMILY

My father, Jacob Dattner, was one of eight children. His father was a casualty of the First World War. The two eldest children, Nathan and Leo, set out for America in their late teens. Nathan died at the age of 21 of TB. Leo established himself in America and was a successful businessman. The rest of the family was caught up in the Holocaust, but the five brothers and their children survived. This was truly remarkable. Their mother, Fanny, and only sister, Hilda, did not survive. They were in the Krakow ghetto and when the soldiers came for Fanny, I was told that one of her sons begged them to spare her. He said she was an old woman and could be of harm to no one. The soldier replied, "Well, I could do you a favor and shoot her right here". So she went, and her daughter Hilda chose to go with her mother. We assume that they were sent to Auschwitz but it might have been Belzec. In any case, neither survived the war.

My mother's family was less fortunate. My mother was also one of eight children. The eldest, a girl, died in infancy. I always assumed she died of some infection, but my mother told me years later that the child had toddled off and drowned in a near-by creek. Her mother, Gisela Indich Loblowitz died of natural causes before the war. Her father, Adolf, was shot in a mass grave in Nowy Targ along with his son, Samuel, who had cerebral palsy. My mother's two older sisters, Lola and Regina, also perished, but again, we are not sure when or where. Two younger brothers, Isador and Emanuel, also did not survive the war. The only surviving sibling was her younger sister, Mila. Family photographs did not survive either, except for a few that my mother had sent to a friend who had settled in America some time before the war. But these did not include photos of her parents or of her brothers, and it hurt my mother that she had no such momentos. Sometimes she would cut out a photo from a newspaper if she thought the person resembled a family member and kept that photo on her desk. It always made me sad to see that.

Since I was born in 1940, I was a small child during the years of war and devastation. My story is thus a composite of my own memories and things my parents told me as I was growing up. I was born in Krakow, Poland in early March, just six months after the German invasion. My mother said that the invasion created panic among the Jewish population of Zywiec-Zablocie and everyone fled their homes. They soon found that there was nowhere to go for safety and returned home. But not for long. My father was in the Polish army and was called to duty and Zywiec was in an area the Germans wanted to make Judenrein and so ordered all Jews to leave. My mother left bedding and other belongings she could not carry with a Gentile neighbor and headed for Krakow where some of our relatives lived.

My father's war service did not last long for the Polish army was soon defeated. My parents told of the Polish cavalry being sent out against German tanks. My father was leading a unit of men and at one point stopped to consult his map. As he was busy studying the map, his men could hear German tanks approaching and they all ran away. When my father looked up, he was alone and the tanks came into view. He ran into the field as the Germans started shooting at him. He said he could see the dirt spray around him as the machine gun bullets flew, but miraculously he was not hit and he got away. But now he was a soldier without a unit, and unfortunately he had altered the shirt of the uniform to make it more to his liking. My Dad always thought he had a better way of doing something, which annoyed me no end when I was

growing up, but it was almost his undoing at this point. He was picked up by the Polish army and taken for a spy since his uniform was not right. He might have been executed if it hadn't been for a friend from his hometown who happened to walk by and said, "Jacoh, what are you doing here?" Now there was proof that he wasn't a spy and he was allowed to go.

He joined my mother in Krakow but he would not stay for long. Fearing that the Germans would put Jewish men into forced labor, he decided with his younger brother David to go to the Russian sector of Poland. He wanted my mother to go, too, but she refused. She was pregnant and had a three year old son and did not want to undertake the rigors of a journey to the unknown. My father went without her, and I don't think she ever quite forgave him for that.

Mother soon found that she needed some of the belongings she had left behind in Zywiec, but it was illegal for her to cross back into that area. She was determined, however, and arranged with a Polish man to accompany her. They took a train, but the Polish fellow was very nervous and soon deserted my mom. She figured it was just as well, because his frightened demeanor could draw unwanted attention to them. She continued her journey and when she got to their old home she looked through the window. She saw that everything had been taken and all that remained were family photographs strewn on the floor. She went to the gentile neighbors with whom she had left belongings and asked for some of her things back. The woman did not want to give my mom her things. She said they were using the bedding on their bed, and did she want her to take everything apart, just like that? Her husband said, "That's exactly what you are going to do", and mom was able to retrieve some things she needed. There was still the trip back to Krakow, and mom was fearful that she would be stopped and arrested. She decided to go to the cemetery first to visit her mother's grave, and there she cried that she was carrying a new life inside her that she wanted to bring forth and that a three year old boy was waiting for her return. She pleaded with her dead mother to help her. When she looked up she saw through her tears a woman walking near the cemetery. It was a Polish woman she knew, the town butcher's wife. When my mother told her of her predicament, she didn't hesitate to offer my mother her papers to use for the trip home. She trusted my mom to get the papers back to her in some way. My mother made her way safely back to Krakow and for the next several days went to the train station until she saw a young woman from Zywiec who would take the papers back to the kind butcher's wife. My mother felt that it was her mother who had somehow sent this woman to her aid, since the cemetery was a rather isolated spot with little foot traffic about. After the war my parents tried to find this woman to thank her and let her know we had survived, but she was no longer in town. It is possible that she, herself, did not survive the war.

I was born in Krakow on March 3, 1940 with my paternal grandmother, Fanny, and my aunt Lilly in attendance. My mother told me it was a short and easy labor. When I was a few months old mom decided to go to Nowy Targ in southern Poland where her father was living with two of her sisters and a brother who had cerebral palsy. Mother had her family there, but like in Krakow, there was little food. At one point mom traded her gold earrings for a sack of potatoes which kept us going for a while. From their experiences during the war, my parents always felt that one should have some gold in the house, and when we were grown they bought us gold chains and a Kruggarend. My father also believed that one should keep a gun in the house and got one many years later even though he was living safely in Florida. He said that the Jews were helpless because they had no guns and he didn't want to be in such a position again.

Except for our poverty, we lived undisturbed in Nowy Targ. My grandfather was a kind and gentle man and deeply religious. I am told that he walked the floor with me when I was teething and helped take care of me but the only image I have of him is his sitting at the table,

reading the Bible. This is one of my earliest memories. The other early memory from the days at Novy Targ is being taken to a doctor when I had whooping cough. I was very sick and being poorly nourished made it worse. But mom was reluctant to take me to the doctor because the only available doctor was a known anti-Semite, and mom was afraid he would as soon kill me as treat me. But finally I was so sick she was afraid that I would die anyway, so she took me to see him. I vaguely remember crying on the way there. I think I picked up my mother's anxiety about going to this doctor. I also remember screaming when he gave me a shot in the buttocks and I don't know what was in the injection, but he told my mom I would sleep a lot after, which I did, and then I got better. Once when I saw vomit in the street I remember thinking that someone must have had whooping cough because that had been my experience with the disease.

Meanwhile, my father was in Lvov in eastern Poland, working in a bakery with one of my mother's brothers. His own brother, David, did not stay long in Lvov but soon returned to his wife and small son. They made their way to Italy and from there sailed to Cuba, a country that was admitting Jews at the time. My Uncle David had told my mom that my dad would be returning soon, but, to my mom's great disappointment, that did not happen for a while. The situation was complicated by the German invasion of Eastern Poland in 1941. It was in the eastern sector that the Germans started their atrocities. At one point my dad was rounded up with other Jewish men who were to be shot. It was his good fortune that he was among the last to be brought into the barn where the Jews were being held, so that he was able to hear the German officer ask if anyone knew how to build pontoon bridges. Since he had been trained to do this in the Polish army, my dad came forward. He then thought to save some of his friends, so he told the German officer he would need some people to work with him. Before he could pick anyone, several men got up and stood at his side. He didn't know them, but he felt he couldn't send them back to die, so he said nothing.

Dad knew that to stay where he was would be certain death but crossing back to western Poland was difficult. The Germans had closed the border and anyone found in the west who was suspected of coming from the east could be shot. He decided to enlist the help of a sympathetic German soldier, if he could find one. Talking to the soldiers was not a problem, since both my parents were fluent in German. The Jews in their part of Poland spoke German rather than Yiddish, and of course, they spoke Polish. The fact that my parents spoke both these languages well helped make possible our survival. Before approaching a soldier, Dad told me he studied their faces, looking for someone who appeared to be a decent person. He finally went up to a soldier and asked, "Couldn't I be a German like you?" The soldier replied, "How can I help you?" and my father knew that he had chosen well. This was not the only time that someone in my family was fortunate to come upon a German soldier who had not entirely discarded his humanity when he put on a uniform. My uncle David was once walking in the ghetto with his wife and small son when he was ordered by a German soldier to shovel snow. David refused, telling the German to find someone else to do the task. The German reached for his gun, and my Aunt Ella implored him to do as he was ordered. So my uncle shoveled the snow with great force. The German was impressed by his strength and said to him "You can work hard, Jew". David defiantly replied "I work hard when I want to". The German said "If this were Germany, I would have shot you". Of course, he could have shot him anyway for his insolence if he had wanted to. Germans didn't need to justify to anyone the killing of Jews.

The German soldier my father approached arranged for him to go to the western zone on a mail truck, and once there, my dad went to buy a train ticket to Novy Targ. A different currency was used in this part of Poland, but the ticket seller, rather than turning my dad in, was

kind enough to exchange the money and give him a ticket. When he came back to us I was about two years old. He was surprised to see that Jews were still living openly in Nowy Targ, since they were being murdered in the east. On September 1, 1942, when I was 2 1/2, they came for the Jews of Nowy Targ. Again we were fortunate. Our house was across the street from the town secretary, and the Germans made some commotion as they tried to wake her early that morning to obtain a list of the Jews in the town. As my father went out to see what the noise was about, her boyfriend told him that the Germans have come with trucks. My father knew immediately what was happening. Our house was also located at the edge of town, near the woods, so that escape was still possible. He and my mother gathered up a few belongings, and my mother asked her father if he wanted to come with us. He declined, saying he was an old man. He knew that he would be a liability - not only because of his age, but because he wore a beard as did other religious Jews. My mother told me years later, "I did not ask him twice".

We fled into the woods and remained there for close to ten days. The first day we could hear shooting and I can only imagine how my mother must have felt. She dearly loved her father. He had been the more nurturing parent and she had been closer to him than to her mother. Often on the anniversary of his death mom would remind me of what happened that day and cry. Her brother, who had cerebral palsy, must also have perished that day, since we learned later that the old, young, and disabled were taken to the town cemetery and shot, while the able bodied were sent to concentration camps. My mother's two older sisters may have been among those transported, but I never knew what happened to them. They did not survive the war.

Being in the woods under those circumstances must have been frightening to me and I began to cry. My father tried to quiet me because of the possibility that the Germans were searching the woods or that a Pole would find us and betray us. When I wouldn't stop crying, he hit me so hard that my lip bled, and then I stopped. I learned early on that I had to obey because so much depended on my doing what I was told. The one thing that I remember about the woods is that my parents had not brought my potty chair, and I had recently been toilet trained and refused to go on the ground. My father made sort of a seat out of some flat rocks but I found this a poor substitute.

Since we had little to eat, my father would go at night to the home of a gentile friend whose son had played with my brother and he would give my father some food for us. My father knew that his brother Bruno, who was in the Krakow ghetto, had already obtained false papers giving him a gentile identity. He asked the friend to travel to Krakow to borrow the papers for us so that we could come out of the woods. The friend agreed, but the next time my dad came, he found that the man had not made the journey. His wife didn't want him to go since it entailed some danger. My father begged him to go, and he finally did and was able to bring us the papers. We owe our life to this man, and after the war my parents contacted him to thank him and let him know we had survived. His response was chilling. He did not want us to ever visit him or write to him or send him anything. He was afraid that his neighbors would find out that he had helped a Jewish family.

My parents buried their own papers in the woods and assumed a new identity. My uncle's papers bore a last name that meant "warm" in Polish. Now my mother had to teach me my new identity, since small children were often asked questions in the hope that they would innocently reveal the truth. She repeated several times what our names were, and then she tested me. She asked me what my father's name was and I answered correctly, and I did so again for her name and my brother's. But when she asked me my name, I gave the Polish word for "hot" as my last name. My mother said she didn't know whether to laugh or to cry. Then she made sure I knew I

was just "warm" like the rest of the family.

We came out of the woods but had to trudge to a railroad station in another town where no one might recognize us. It was raining and we must have looked pretty bedraggled by this time. We did arouse the suspicion of a Pole who wondered who we were and what we were doing. My parents said we had been camping and then my mother challenged him by loudly insisting that dad show him our papers. So he assumed that we were telling the truth and walked away. It wasn't the last time that my mother would have to bluff her way through a situation.

We went to the Krakow ghetto since we had to return my uncle's papers and obtain our own. We arrived in the ghetto on September 9, 1942 and we stayed with my uncle Bruno, his wife Lilly, and their two children, Hana and David. Hana was a little younger than my brother Eric, but she told me that she fell in love with him and wanted only to play with him. I was the little sister and generally ignored. Also in the ghetto was my mother's younger sister, Mila, who worked as a secretary outside the ghetto. It didn't take us long to get our own papers and this time our name was to be Slurzewski – not a name I could play with. The question was, where could we go? My aunt Mila asked her boss if he knew of some job that was available for a friend who spoke German and knew German shorthand (My mother had gone to a German secretarial school some years before.) He knew she was asking about a job for a Jewish woman but that didn't matter to him. He said he knew of a job in Lvov and that suited my parents, who wanted to get away from places where people might know them. My father also heard that a soldier from his regiment, Zygmunt Babilonek, wanted to see him and this man introduced him to Jakub Matlakiewicz, who offered to write to his sister in Lvov asking her to take us in until we found a place of our own. So on September 16, 1942 my parents bribed the Polish guards, walked out of the ghetto and removed their armbands. Just then my mother turned and saw some German soldiers. She was terrified that they had seen us and thought we had come to the end. But surprisingly, they paid no attention to us. Either they hadn't seen my parents remove the armbands or they just didn't want to be bothered. In any case, we began our journey east.

We made our way to Mr. Matlakiewicz's sister, Mrs. Arabska, and she took us in, no questions asked. I am told that when she showed me my bed, I climbed on it and said over and over, "thank you, thank you, thank you". That night I wet the bed, to my mother's great embarrassment, but we had been through so much since leaving our home in Nowy Targ that such an accident wasn't surprising. I am told that Mrs. Arabska was very understanding.

We did not need to stay long at her house; there were many vacant apartments in Lvov since the Jews had already been deported. My parents have said that we lived in many places, often moving when they felt someone was getting suspicious of us. I remember some of these flights. We usually left a place at night, and the times I remember were the times I was sick with a sore throat and running a fever, but I had to walk because my parents were carrying the few belongings we had. And often I had to wear several layers of clothing, perhaps all I had, so that there would be less to carry. On one train trip I became quite warm and another passenger asked my mother why she had dressed me so warmly. Mom made some excuse about my usually being cold, but she didn't want to remove much of my clothing because the woman would see several layers and might get suspicious. On another train trip I lost my hat and mittens. My mother didn't scold me for my carelessness, but I could see she was upset and I felt bad. To this day I get anxious when I've lost something, no matter how small or of how little value.

I also have a memory of being on a train and crossing into Czechoslovakia. We reached our destination in the middle of the night while I was sleeping. My mother roused me and told me I had to get up. I must have been in a deep sleep because my body felt like lead and it was

only with the greatest difficulty that I got on my feet and started walking. We didn't stay in Czechoslovakia as far as I know. In one place we stayed my parents came to trust the landlady and confided in her that we were Jewish. "Oh" she said, "I knew you were Jews the day you moved in. Who but Jews would come, four people and only two small suitcases?"

I have vague memories of staying briefly with other people, and on some of these sojourns we picked up lice. I think there was both body and head lice, and I can only imagine how it must have bothered my mother, who was always so fastidious. What really bothered me were the hours my mother went through my hair, picking out the nits. My hair was long and thick and she invariably pulled my hair in the process so these sessions were rather painful. But as in most things, I had no say in the matter. I remember one time when she was picking and pulling at my hair I asked her when the war would be over. She didn't know what to tell me.

Despite these flights, I remember only one apartment in Lvov and perhaps that was where we spent the longest time. We were on the top floor and the front door of our apartment opened onto a balcony hallway that circled an inner courtyard. One wing of the building was already rubble, destroyed in a bombing before we had arrived. The rubble was our playground. As I recall we had no heat and some nights water in a glass by my mother's bed would be ice by morning. On some exceptionally cold nights we went to sleep in a neighbor's house. I guess they had a space heater which must have given off some kind of fumes because I invariably awoke in the morning with a splitting headache. It felt like someone had put a hatchet in my head. Not surprisingly, I hated going there but I guess it was better than freezing. On very cold days, my brother and I often stayed in bed all day just to keep warm.

There was not much for us kids to do anyway. I don't recall having any toys and we weren't allowed out to play very often. With my brown eyes and brown curly hair I didn't look like the typical Polish child. In fact, my brother told me that one time we were outside when a man pointed to me and said, "Is that a Jewish child?" My brother felt awful but he backed away from me because he was circumcised, and it would be easy to determine that he was Jewish. Fortunately, no one tried to make anything of this man's question so nothing happened to me. My brother definitely bore a heavier burden than I since he knew we were Jewish and I did not. I remember that he kept us all up one night crying that he was afraid to die. My mother tried to comfort and reassure him, but under the circumstances, his fear was not unrealistic. I, on the other hand, was being raised to be proud of being Polish. I sometimes wondered why my mother occasionally asked, "When you grow up, would you marry a Jew?" I invariably said no. After all, I had heard that terrible things were happening to Jews so I assumed that they must be bad people.

The only playmate we had at the time was a boy next door, who was closer to my brother's age than to mine. He was full of mischief and I really disliked him. One memory I have of him concerns what he did one Christmas Eve, although I have to admit I was a willing participant that time. Since we were living as Christians, my parents had gone to Mass and left us home alone. Eric was sick in bed. The neighbor boy came over with a big cup of home made cherry wine that his parents sent as a gift. Since Eric was sick and not able to interfere, this boy thought it would be fun not to let him have any but to let me drink the whole thing. Well, it tasted very good so I did drink it and ate the cherries at the bottom of the cup. A little later, boy was I sick. By the time my parents came home I was drunk and had the dry heaves. My mother thought I would feel better if I had something to eat, so she scrambled one of her precious eggs for me. I love eggs but I could not eat much of it. It did make me vomit, however, and I started feeling a little better. I remember another Christmas Eve when my parents came home from



church with a gingerbread cookie for each of us. What a treat! I never got to eat cookies. I was anxious to gobble it up, but it had a picture of a gingerbread boy pasted on it, and it took quite a bit of work to get that off. And another memory I have of eggs concerns a neighbor. I was invited into the neighbor's home and the woman asked if I would like an egg. I said yes, expecting that she would cook it for me. Instead, she punched a hole on the top and bottom of the shell, and expected me to suck the raw egg out of its shell. I tried it but it tasted terrible to me, and I refused to eat it. She was quite disgusted with me since no one had food to waste in those days, so she ate the raw egg herself.

My mother worked in an office of an animal slaughterhouse, which was a good job since she sometimes was able to bring a little meat home for us. My father stayed home with us, and he home schooled my brother since the Germans had closed the schools. He tried to teach me to count and recite the alphabet, but I don't think I was a very apt pupil. And we weren't alone for long. Some months after we were settled in Lvov my parents heard that the Krakow ghetto was to be liquidated. My father's brothers who were there had already made plans for their escape but there was no one to help my mother's sister, Mila. My mother decided to get her and bring her back to our apartment, where we would hide her. This was a difficult and dangerous undertaking.

She got on a train to Krakow, bringing with her a piece of fur with which to fashion a collar for Mila's coat. Jewish women did not wear any fur – it had been confiscated from them some time ago. But gentile women still had their furs. While on the train, a younger woman made my mother's acquaintance and they were chatting when the train was stopped and it was announced that everyone had to get off. The German army needed the train. My mother disembarked and the young woman stayed with her. Since it was late in the day, they went knocking on doors to see if anyone could put them up for the night. At one house they were welcomed in, but the lady of the house told them that two men were also staying there and they would have to share a room. My mother felt that they didn't have much choice, so they accepted that arrangement. No sooner were they in bed when the two men came over and tried to rape them. My mother said they had to fight very hard to get them off, and needless to say, they didn't get a wink of sleep that night.

My mother was able to continue her journey the next day and when she arrived in Krakow, she was able to connect with my aunt where she worked, which was outside the ghetto. They managed to attach the piece of fur to the collar of my aunt's coat to make her less conspicuous and less likely to be stopped and asked for papers. My aunt accompanied my mother to our place in Lvov, where my mom must have snuck her in, since she had no papers and no one could know of her presence. She was not the only person we hid. We hid my father's younger brother Joseph for a very short time, and his youngest brother Romek stayed with us for a longer period. Both managed to get false papers and my father fixed the papers up, attaching their photographs, etc., and they both made their separate ways to Warsaw. I don't know the details but they both survived the war. My father had fashioned a hiding place in our apartment for our relatives. It was a small area that had been a pantry off the kitchen. My father took off the molding of the doorway, built up the wall so that only a small opening was left, and then a piece of furniture was put against that wall to hide the opening. If anyone came to the door, our "guests" would scurry into their little hiding place. I don't think the three of them were ever there at the same time, but I know that Mila and Romek were with us together. I think that Romek left before Mila did, and I have clearer memories of my aunt and spending time with her. I became very fond of her.

One day a man who was being chased by the police burst into our apartment, climbed out

the window and escaped over the roof. The police were pretty sure they had seen him come into our place so they came looking for him. By this time, my aunt and uncle had managed to hide. The police searched all over and could not find the man they had been chasing. So they turned to me, knowing that in their innocence small children are usually truthful, and asked, "Is anyone hiding here?" My mother said she froze in fear since there were two people hiding within a couple of feet of me. Somehow I had the presence of mind to lie and I denied that anyone was hiding. My uncle always credited me with saving his life, and of course, all our lives were at stake. My brother told me that the police still weren't satisfied and they took my dad to the police station for questioning. This meant that we were all still in danger because all they had to do was pull his pants down to see that he was circumcised. I don't know what he told them on the way, but they abandoned their plan to take him to the police station and let him return home. Maybe they just decided they didn't want to bother with him. It wasn't till years later that my mother told me they had kept a stack of stones in the apartment. The plan was that if we were ever found out and they came to arrest us, we would all stand together and throw stones at the police, which would cause them to shoot us right there. They devised this plan because my mother couldn't bear the thought that her children might be murdered before her eyes, and the thought that we might have to watch our parents die anguished her as well. Better to all go together in a hail of gunfire.

There was at least one other incident involving the police, and this time I think it was the Gestapo. A Jewish woman had somehow managed to kill a German officer and escape, and the Germans were livid. There was an intensive search for her and something in my mother's appearance matched a description of her. My mother was arrested as she was coming home from work and taken down for questioning. Although her papers said otherwise, they accused her of being Jewish and told her they had a dog which could smell a Jew. This did worry my mom, but the dog did not react to her. She figured the dog might be able to pick up the scent of someone who had been in a camp or the whole thing was a ruse to frighten her. Of course, she was frightened but she decided she had to bluff her way through this. She told them that her boss was a very important man and she was a valued employee and that if anything happened to her, he would make a lot of trouble for those responsible. She kept saying, "Go ahead, call him and he'll tell you who I am. Go ahead, call him." They finally got tired of her and let her go. Meanwhile we were waiting for her at home and didn't know what had happened. I was afraid that my mother was dead. We were overjoyed to see her come home safe and sound. The next day at work one of her co-workers who had seen her being picked up by the Gestapo asked her what that had been all about. Not wanting to arouse a hint of suspicion, she did not tell him that they confused her with a Jewish woman. Instead, she told him that she had been taking home a small piece of liver and blood was leaking from the package which made the police suspicious.

There was another time that my mother was late coming home from work and again we were extremely worried. This time she had gotten run over by a truck! The truck driver was backing up and didn't see her and she later described feeling the wheel going over her. Fortunately, she suffered only a few broken ribs. Another time she came home shaken, her face ashen gray. It seems that the bus she took to work went by the ghetto and that day it was being liquidated. She saw people being beaten and pushed into trucks, while others were jumping out windows to their deaths to avoid being taken. It was a horrendous sight, but made much worse by the comments of the Poles on the bus with her. They said things like, "It serves the dirty Jews right" and made it obvious that they approved of what was happening. It made my mother's skin crawl. Another time she came home and told us she had passed a large box on the street from



which came sounds of moaning. When she looked in, she saw a man writhing in pain who had been shot in the abdomen and left to die. And these were my bedtime stories.

My mother's younger brother also lived in Lvov, but he had no way of hiding his Jewish identity. He made a living by peddling things he could buy and sell but he could have no contact with us in order not to endanger us. We had to avoid arousing anyone's suspicions. There was always a danger of being found out in some way. One day my mother saw the dentist from her home town among a group of Jewish prisoners. She was terrified that he might show some sign of recognizing her, but he didn't, and she felt awful to see him in this condition but there was nothing she could do. Her brother did know where we lived however, and one day he appeared at our door to give us a sewing machine he had obtained. That sewing machine was a great help to us. My mother hated to sew, but my father was the son of a tailor and he also liked the challenge of learning how to do things on his own. He was able to sew some clothes for us and continued to make much of his own clothes as well as my mother's into old age. He also made us shoes when he had to, and he enjoyed wearing home made sandals the rest of his life.

My mother's brother did not survive the war and I'm not sure exactly what happened to him. It was painful for my mother to talk of her brothers so I didn't question her. I did come home from school one day many years later and found her crying. She had been making inquiries about another brother, the youngest, who had been the family favorite, as is often the case with the youngest in large families. This brother had been in a concentration camp and was alive until almost the end of the war. A fellow inmate devised a plan of escape and wanted my uncle to go with him, but my uncle refused. They knew the war was almost over and he thought it foolish to risk one's life trying to escape. The companion was determined, however, and he was successful in his escape. My uncle was never seen alive again. It is well known that the Germans murdered as many as they could before fleeing. It seems that my uncle and many other prisoners were herded into a large building which was then set on fire. My mother had somehow gotten this information from the man who had escaped. She always felt that if her brother had been a little more daring he would have lived.

As time went by the Russians were bringing the fighting closer to us. There was a time when it seemed to me that there were air raids every night. And whenever we heard the sirens everyone in the building went to a room in the basement, which was the safest place in the building. Of course, people we were hiding could not go with us, since no one could know of their existence. The planes were overhead and the explosions were all around. In fact, one night a bomb landed right by the side of our house. The whole building shook hard and I didn't know what to think, so I looked at my mother and saw fear in her face. Then I was afraid, too. But the shaking stopped and nothing happened, and when the air raid was over, we all returned to our beds. The next day we found out that a bomb had landed right by the house but never exploded. The building was evacuated, and I remember standing with the other tenants across the street and watching the demolition squad take the bomb away. My father told me that the bomb had landed on the side where our "bomb shelter" was located, and had it gone off, we would certainly have been killed.

My aunt Mila felt very vulnerable in the apartment during the air raids and she was becoming increasingly anxious. It was apparent that she couldn't stay much longer under the circumstances. My father decided he would have to make some false papers for her. He went to a nearby German office and hung around until he saw someone discard some papers into the trash. He surreptitiously picked them up, and then he had some official looking paper on which to forge Mila's identity papers. My mother was able to arrange a job for her in a convalescent home

of a convent. A nun who made the referral knew she was Jewish but no one else did. And so my aunt left us. She worked in the convent and on her days off she would have preferred to stay in her room since she was nervous about her forged papers. But to never go anywhere would have invited suspicion as well, so she had no choice but to go out with some of the other workers. Fortunately, no one ever checked her papers carefully, because after the war my father had someone look at the papers and he was told that the papers were an obvious forgery.

At some point my parents obtained a couple of rabbits. The idea was that rabbits are prolific and we would use them as a source of food. My brother told me that we had a cage for them but all I remember is that the rabbits ran around our apartment, leaving their droppings all over the place. I hated that. And then they never did have any young. It turns out that they were both of the same sex. Whether the person who sold them knowingly cheated my parents or whether he had made a mistake was never certain, but my parents ended up getting rid of the rabbits and I don't think we ever ate one. I was glad to see them go. And it isn't that I didn't like animals. Once we had a dead mouse in the apartment and I asked my mother if I could pet it. She seemed horrified by my request and adamantly refused to let me touch it.

As the Russian Army got closer, my parents also wanted to leave Lvov. The countryside would see less combat. My parents knew some people who lived in the mountainous region and these friends invited us to stay with them for a while. The first Sunday we were there my parents did not go to church since our hosts did not go either. Their daughter went, however, and she came home shaken. She said that the townspeople were saying that they were harboring Jews. Now this family didn't know we were Jewish, but it so happened that they were hiding a Jew – a young physician named Mishkin. They could not risk any such suspicions so they told us that we couldn't stay after all. The woman felt very bad that they had to send us away, and she gave me a pretty necklace as a consolation. I loved that necklace and played with it since I had no toys. I still have that necklace of beaded flowers.

We returned to our apartment in Lvov and I remember my father telling my brother and me what to do when we heard the whine of a mortar shell coming. We were to get away from the window and drop to the floor. One day we did hear shelling and my father grabbed my brother and ran out the door, heading for the shelter. My mother scooped me up in her arms and ran out after him. As pieces of the roof fell around our heads, I remember wishing that my father had taken me because he was faster and closer to safety than my mom and I were. But we didn't get hurt and there wasn't much damage to the roof.

As the Russian advance continued, the Germans decided that they needed our building and gave all the tenants 48 hours in which to vacate. Now my dad was frightened because he had to restore the pantry to its original state so that no one could see it was a hiding place. I guess he had left it in case we had to hide someone else. He worked very hard to fix the wall and put the molding back in place. When it was time to leave, my mother decided to leave the piece of furniture in front of that wall just in case it looked different or freshly done. A Polish man came with a wagon to move us and our things to another place, and he couldn't understand why my mom would leave a good piece of furniture behind. He kept arguing with her about taking it and I could see my mother getting increasingly agitated as she insisted she never liked it and didn't want it. I was getting scared, too, because I knew why she was so insistent about leaving the furniture, but the man finally gave up and off we went, although I don't remember where we went.

The fighting intensified and soon there was talk of a German retreat. One day my brother heard some neighbors say that the Germans were fleeing so quickly that they left a warehouse

full of food. Since the people in Lvov were starving, many decided to go to the warehouse to see what they could get. When my brother told my mother that he wanted to go also she very reluctantly gave him permission to go. He went with three other boys and high hopes of coming back with some food for the family. The boys made their way to the basement of the warehouse where they saw sugar, flour, and all sorts of canned goods. They selected some items and were almost ready to leave when they heard screams and gunfire. They raced upstairs and carefully peered outside. What they saw made them freeze in fear. It seems that even though the Germans could not take their provisions with them, they did not want anyone else to have them. They sent a vehicle with a machine gun mounted on it to the courtyard, about a hundred feet from the entrance to the warehouse. They set the building on fire and shot at people trying to flee. My brother and his friends decided the only chance of escape was to run to one side of the courtyard, where there were some fences. The boys dropped whatever food they had gathered and ran for the first fence. My brother thinks that because they were small and there was smoke and confusion they made it safely over the first fence. But they weren't safe yet. They still had to run about another fifty yards before they reached the corner and were no longer visible targets. They were running as fast as they could when they heard bullets whizzing by. Eric heard the boy behind him groan, but it would have been suicide to stop or even turn around. He just kept running and in a few seconds was out of the range of fire. He came home shaken and exhausted, and he never did find out what had happened to that boy.

Meanwhile we heard that the Germans were shooting people who tried to take food. Two teenaged girls from another apartment came to our house crying hysterically that their mother had been shot. My mom tried to comfort them, and it turned out that a bullet had only grazed her temple as she had run away. My parents were, of course, terrified that something would happen to my brother so my father went to the warehouse to find him and bring him home. We didn't know that my brother was already on his way home. He arrived home to find that Dad had gone to get him and then he felt even worse, knowing that Dad was now in danger. There was still shooting in the courtyard when my father got there and he said he had to duck under the arm of a soldier who was shooting at people, but not finding Eric, he came home. And so both were unharmed, but there were no provisions to show for all that risk.

Finally, the Russian Army marched into town. There was much excitement and people were lining the streets to see them. Since we lived on the main street, we stayed in our apartment and looked out the window. I remember hanging out the window with my brother, feeling the joy and excitement of the moment. These feelings did not last very long because the Russians didn't seem to care much about the people they were liberating. I suppose they really couldn't – they had fought long and hard, and there was still much fighting to do. But there was a definite strain of anti-Semitism. My parents said they heard soldiers say things like, "We marched all the way from Moscow to help these people"? And they took what they wanted. My mother said she saw Russian soldiers who had never seen flush toilets yank them out and place them on trucks to take with them, thinking they would work wherever they were set down.

One evening a relative came to see us. I don't know who he was, only that he was somehow related to us. He told us stories of his survival and kept repeating the phrase, "So I'm a Jew – so what"? So I began to wonder – if he is a Jew and he is related, does that mean we're Jewish, too? I waited till he left and then I asked my mother if we were Jewish and she said yes, we are. It was finally safe to let me know. But I was very upset. I had been brought up to be proud of being Polish, which meant non-Jew, and I knew it was bad and dangerous to be Jewish, and all of a sudden, I was part of this despised group. My feelings were in turmoil as I went to

bed, but I finally understood why my mother sometimes asked me if I would marry a Jew when I grew up. And I did marry a Jew and my Jewish identity is strong, despite this inauspicious beginning.

With the retreat of the Germans we were physically safer but financially worse off, since the company for which my mother worked no longer existed. We no longer had any source of income. My father tried to do what he could. He scrounged around buildings that had been destroyed in the fighting to see what could be salvaged and sold on the black market. He was imprisoned by the Russians at some point and while he was gone, a Russian soldier came to our door one evening, saying that there was some light coming from our window. We were to maintain blackout conditions because of possible bombings and the blanket had not been properly hung over the window. He stayed and talked to my mom, and I could see she was a little uncomfortable with him. I remember him taking her by the shoulders and I didn't know what he was doing but he frightened me. He frightened my mom as well, because when there was a knock on the door the next night, she told us to be very quiet and pretend that no one was home. He never came back after that.

The Russians let my dad go, but I seem to remember that he was gone again for a while and he may have been fighting with partisans or perhaps had rejoined the army. One of my uncles told of seeing my father in a uniform with the rank of lieutenant at the end of the war. In any case, there was a time when my mother thought he might be dead, and she told Eric and me to get down on our knees and pray for his return. I thought things must really be bad because my mother was not a religious person. But my dad returned once more and my parents decided that it would be best to leave Lvov, and start heading west. We went to Katowice where we were given an apartment that had belonged to Germans. The occupants were ordered to leave but my parents told them they could take what they wanted. My mother said the woman was in a state of shock and not thinking well. She kept packing her husband's starched collars and leaving more useful things behind. The apartment was a wonderland for me. It was full of all sorts of things. The first thing my mother did was open a can of pears for Eric and me. They tasted so good! There was lots of canned food, and we found things stuck away in all sorts of places. In the stove was a box with silk stockings and in a shoe box under the china closet was a beautiful doll. I had never had a doll. And in the china cabinet were little glass animals. They looked so lovely to me. One thing that made me think was an orange juice squeezer. I tried to imagine what an orange must look like for I had never seen an orange. I thought it must have ridges to fit the ridges of the squeezer. It would be some time before I would learn that I was wrong.

Our diet was now improved, although I didn't like to eat anyway. Maybe I had picked up on anxiety about food. Still, my mother tried to get me to eat. In the past, when she had only a little bit of something, she would send my brother out and give it to me to eat. This was not because she favored me, but because Eric had gotten a better nutritional start in life than I had. Often as not, I would refuse to eat it and my brother got it anyway. In Katowice, when we had a little more food, my mom tried to fatten me up a bit. She fried some bread in butter and I ate it but I decided that I didn't like it and I wouldn't eat it the next time she made me a piece. I just didn't like the taste of butter, and I still don't. But my mother kept trying. One day my mother buttered a piece of bread and put a layer of jam on top, hoping I wouldn't notice the butter. I took one bite and refused to eat the rest. Just then a man came to the door, begging for something to eat. She handed him the sandwich I had refused, and when he saw that she had given him not just a piece of bread, but a piece with butter and jam on it, he was so grateful he thanked her over and over again. I could sense that his effusiveness was making my mom a little uncomfortable. My

mother had also been concerned that we had gotten so little sun, having to stay indoors much of the time. Now that it was safe, she made Eric and me sit on a window sill with our bare backs to an open window. I was scared the whole time that I would fall out the window.

We still had little to live on, and at one point the currency was changed and we had hardly any money. There was a kind of farmer's market at the end of our street and one day I took it into my head that I wanted to buy something. Mother wasn't feeling well and didn't want to go. She also explained that we had so little of the new money that I wouldn't be able to buy anything anyway. But I was stubborn and insisted on going, so she gave me the money and I wandered around and saw I could get nothing and came home, only to realize that I had lost the little money we had. When my mom told my dad about my losing the money I felt terrible.

It was under the Russian occupation that I went to see my first movie. The Russians occasionally showed movies, and my brother and a friend were going one day and agreed to take me along. I was excited about seeing a movie, since that would be an entirely new experience for me. It was a cold winter day and the movie was shown in an unheated room in which were set up chairs and a screen. The movie started, showing a farmer in a wagon pulled by horses, getting his field ready for planting. Something spooked the horses and they started running fast, and in an effort to control them, the farmer got caught in the reins and was dragged on the ground by the running horses. And then the film broke. We sat and waited for them to fix it and they tried playing the movie two more times, and each time it broke, and so the show was cancelled. By this time, I had gotten pretty cold just sitting in the "theater" and now we had to walk home. The boys were in no hurry, but enjoyed themselves sliding on the many patches of ice on the sidewalk. I tried to join in, but by this time I could no longer feel my feet, which made sliding on ice, not to mention walking, a little difficult. By the time we got home, my feet and lower legs were completely numb. My mom warmed my feet in some tepid water, but as they warmed I got needles and pins sensations followed by rather severe pain. Despite the fact that my first movie experience was a total failure, I continued to experience, well into adulthood, a special sense of excitement whenever I entered a movie theater.

In Katowice we were reunited with my aunt Mila and my parents decided that we could all use a vacation. We went to the beach in Gdynia and I remember two things about that trip. One was that I had some kind of stomach trouble and I was taken to a doctor who thought I might have appendicitis but that turned out not to be the case. The other memory is that of seeing a dead man's bloated body lying on the beach. I remember that ants were crawling in his eyes. I don't know if his death was accidental or a murder or suicide, but it seems that there was no getting away from horror of one sort or another.

But there were other kinds of experiences, too. I remember walking with my mother down a street when I saw pansies growing in someone's yard. They looked so pretty to me that I made my mom stop so I could get a better look. I hadn't seen many flowers. And then one morning I awoke to the sound of my mother's incredulous voice saying again and again, "The war is over, the war is over". My father had been out and that was the word on the street. I guess my mother couldn't believe that we had all survived after all. She told me many years later that all during the war she had felt like a hunted animal and had lived in fear and that if it hadn't been for the fact that she wanted her children to live, she would have given up. It was just too hard.

Now that the war was over, it was time to decide what we would do. My parents decided not to try to return to their home town. They had heard stories of Jews who returned, only to be killed by Poles who didn't want Jews back and who didn't want to give back any property that had belonged to them. They would have liked to go to Israel, which was still the territory of

Palestine controlled by the British, but the British were not allowing Jews entry. Jews who were caught trying to enter Palestine were shipped off to camps in Cyprus, and my parents couldn't stand the thought of languishing in some displaced person camp. They wanted us to have a normal life and attending school was an important part of that. Since my father had a brother who had emigrated to the United States before the first World War, it seemed possible that we would be able to come to the US. But first we had to make our way to the American Zone where we could apply for visas.

We packed our things and since there were items to spare in the apartment, my mother gave some shirts to a cousin of hers. This cousin got on the train with us as we began our journey west. Also getting on the train was a man without any shirt—he was bare from the waist up. My mother told her cousin to give him a shirt but he didn't want to part with the few things he had. My mother threatened to take back all the shirts so he did give that poor fellow a shirt. I had my doll, of course, and during the train trip I let another little girl play with it. She broke the doll's head. She may have done it on purpose or it may have been an accident, but I went crying to my mother. She consoled me, saying that I would get another doll before long. And she was right because when we came to this country and visited my Uncle Leo in Buffalo, his teen age daughters, Gilda and Rita, bought me a beautiful doll dressed in a red cape with a hood.

We made our way to Germany and stayed for a while on some farm. Our living quarters were separate from the main house and the walls were of knotted pine. I still don't like knotted pine for the memories it brings. Upon our arrival there a young girl asked me in German if I would like to take a walk. I didn't understand what she said and I was scared and clung to my mother's legs. My mother laughed and explained that the girl was just being friendly. Her name was Maria and she was a pretty girl, blond and blue eyed, and she did some of the chores around the farm. When I learned that she was not living with her family I felt profoundly sorry for her. She was living my nightmare. I had lived with the fear of losing my parents, and there had been times when we thought one parent or the other was dead. The fear was so great that I dreaded any separation from my parents. Once they left Eric and me with some people while they had to attend to their affairs and I never left the window the whole time, just watching for their return. But Maria seemed happy and did not act like a forlorn orphan. There was another child there—a boy with Downs Syndrome. He came into our apartment one day while my father was sewing something and he couldn't stop laughing. Men weren't supposed to sew, he insisted. That was woman's work and my mother should have been at the sewing machine.

I don't know how long we were there but I did pick up a little German. My mother used to laugh because I learned it with a Bavarian accent. At some point we got to go to the American consulate to apply for immigration to the US. As we waited for the consul to see us, my mother fussed over my unruly hair, trying to make me look neat while an American official was in the waiting room, watching us. It turns out that was the consul, who was amused at mother's efforts to make me presentable. He did not believe that we were Jewish, because he had yet to see an intact Jewish family. My parents didn't have their original documents; those had been buried in the woods in Novy Targ. I assume that my parents convinced him but in any case, we were given permission to come to the US. I remember being in some camp while we awaited transport.

Our ship was a converted troop ship in which men and women slept on bunk beds in separate quarters. So Eric went with my dad and I was with my mother. I don't know the name of the ship but my mother had told me that it was only the second one to be bringing refugees to America. The crossing took about ten days and several days into the trip someone committed suicide by jumping overboard. Our ship circled the area the whole night but the body was never



found. We also experienced rough seas so that we were sea sick much of the time. My mother was the most affected, but Eric and I found other kids to play with and kept busy. My mother told me that our family was invited to dinner with the captain, which was an honor, but I have no memory of this.

As we were approaching New York harbor there was great excitement on board. People crowded the decks to get a view of the Statue of Liberty, but we kids didn't appreciate the significance nor could we see very well over the heads of adults, so we went below and played. We had a rope and while two kids held the rope, another would take a running start and jump over it. Then the rope would be held higher. When my brother took his turn he slipped on an orange peel lying on the ground, fell and broke his arm. He turned absolutely green with pain. He told me to go get mom or dad but in the confusion of our arriving in New York, I could not find them. They found Eric and saw that he needed medical attention. There was no time to attend to him on the boat and my family was informed that we would not be allowed to disembark with the other passengers but would have to go to Ellis Island where a doctor could examine his arm. The other passengers were free to go since new arrivals were no longer routinely processed in Ellis Island.

We stood on the dock for some time while arrangements were made to take us to Ellis Island. I was holding a battered one-eared teddy bear and getting increasingly bored. At one point I tired of holding the bear and turned to put him on top of our luggage. Just then someone called to me to get my attention and I saw a man with a camera. He motioned for me to pick up the bear again, which I did, and he took my picture. Perhaps there was a photo of me in some newspaper the next day. We were finally put in a police boat to take us to Ellis Island. My brother, tired and still in pain, put his head down on my mother's lap and one of the policemen told him gruffly to sit up. My mother's heart sank. She wondered what we had come to. She thought we were getting away from uniformed men ordering people about.

Our arrival at Ellis Island was equally disconcerting. The place was being used as a prison housing people waiting to be deported and as we came into the main hall, all we could hear was the German language. Again, not what we had expected in America. I don't know how long we stayed there but I think it was at least overnight. I remember walking down the hall for meals and seeing someone unlock people's doors so they could go to the dining hall. Our room was not locked, however. Eric's arm was set and put in a cast after mother heard a doctor speaking Yiddish and went over to him and got him to look at Eric's arm. We were anxious to get the medical attention and leave.

The first place we went was to the home of a friend who was also the brother of my father's sister-in-law. His name was Ernest Rubinfeld and with his wife, Metza, they welcomed us into their home in Jackson Heights. I felt overwhelmed by what seemed to me the great luxury of their place. The carpets were so thick I felt as if I could just sink in and get completely lost in the carpet. And they gave me my first banana. I had never seen one before. At some point we also visited my Uncle Leo and Aunt Eva in Buffalo. They had three children. The boy was about Eric's age and I didn't pay much attention to him, but I was dazzled by my two teen aged cousins, Rita and Gilda. They seemed like goddesses to me. They took me shopping for a bathing suit and some clothes, since I had little to wear. I did have a dress that had been given to me by the Red Cross back in Germany. It was orange with white polka dots and I thought it was pretty ugly. Years later when I saw "The Sound of Music" in which Julie Andrews says she was wearing a dress that even the poor didn't want, it made me think of my orange dress.

We had to find a place to live and I remember looking at several properties in various

places. One was a small house in Jackson Heights. I remember it because in front of the house was an old tricycle, and I thought if we took that place, maybe they would leave that old tricycle and I could have it. I could see that it would be a bit small for me, but I wanted it anyway. I never had anything like it. Well, we didn't take that place and I never did get any kind of bicycle when I was growing up.

We also looked at a tenement apartment in New York City. The place was a dump, with a filthy staircase that looked in worse shape than some of the places we had lived in in Europe. Mom and Dad said critical things about the place in Polish to each other, and it turned out that the landlady showing us the place understood every word. But what really bothered me about the place was a bathtub in the kitchen. I couldn't believe it. One would have to take a bath in the middle of the kitchen, in full view of anyone in the room. I longed for some privacy. Even though I had been young, I had suffered from a lack of privacy. I had had to use potty chairs in one room apartments, share outhouses and all sorts of bathroom facilities. I was therefore relieved that we did not rent that place.

That first summer in America (we had arrived in June, 1946) we ended up on a chicken farm in New Jersey. My dad worked on the farm, which he hated, and my mom felt very isolated. She had no transportation and no way to go shopping for groceries and other needed items. So one day she took us kids and hitchhiked to the grocery store. The farmer was annoyed that she had done that but she didn't know what else to do. I hated that farm, too. Because I seemed to have flat feet, mom made me walk around barefoot, thinking it would strengthen my foot muscles. But there were chicken droppings everywhere and I was very unhappy. I found myself wanting to strangle some of the chicks. These hostile feelings surprised me and, of course, I never acted on them.

Ernest Rubinfeld advised that we look for a place to live in Monticello, New York, since it was a summer resort and there could be lots of places available at the end of the summer. I remember looking at one house. It was two levels, and as we stood at the bottom of the stairs, I could see the bathroom. Might we have a bathroom all to ourselves? I was reluctant to ask my mother because if she had to tell me that was not the case, she would feel bad that she had to disappoint me. I had learned not to ask for things because I didn't want my parents to feel bad that they couldn't give me what I wanted. I thought that somehow the things of this world were not meant for me. But here was this house and this bathroom, so I turned to my brother and asked him if we would have that bathroom all to ourselves. With all the authority of a ten year old he replied, "Nah, someone will probably move in upstairs" and my hopes were dashed. Well, we didn't rent that house anyway. We moved into a rooming house and had to share a bathroom with other tenants.

We lived in this rooming house while my father was building a house for us. Uncle Leo bought some property in Monticello for us to build a house and my dad did much of the work. My uncles Leo and David came and also helped when they could. So we finally got our own bathroom, although the house was pretty basic. In Monticello, too, my sister Fay was born, named after my paternal grandmother who perished in one of the camps, and Eric and I started school. Since we spoke no English the school had to decide how to place us. We were the only foreigners in town and there were no English as a second language programs then. Eric got placed in the proper grade – fourth – because he knew long division, but I was six and a half and didn't know much of anything, so I got put in kindergarten. I was terribly disappointed. I thought I was going to learn to read and instead all we did was play. Going to school was hard for me anyway. I was uneasy about separation from my parents, and I didn't understand what was being

said in class. It was a totally alien environment, but I did the best I could and I caught up with my age mates by skipping second grade and then doing junior high in two years instead of three.

And so, little by little, we all adjusted to our new lives, but the horror of the Holocaust was always in the background and would sometimes come to the surface. In 1949 or 1950, when we were living in Buffalo, my mother decided to wash a blanket we must have gotten in Germany at the end of the war. When she washed it, a great many long strands of obviously human hair came out of the blanket. It apparently had been made mostly of human hair cut from the heads of victims of the Nazis. To say my mother was horror-stricken would be an understatement. All she could think about was getting that blanket out of the house. My father somehow disposed of it. It is too bad that there were no Holocaust museums then which would have wanted an article of this nature.

Our life as immigrants was not always easy, but we were grateful to have that life. As I think back over those years, I know that I owe my survival to the kindness of some people, to a little luck, but mainly to the courage and resourcefulness of my parents. I could so easily have been just another small body in a very large grave.

I want to thank my cousin Ilana Feldstein of Ashdod, Israel, for supplying some of the details from documents and letters she has in her possession.

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